Gandhi Ji and Satyagrah Darshan

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Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born on 2 October 1869 at Porbandar, which was then part of the Bombay Presidency, British India. The Jain traditions of the region influenced the young Mohandas deeply as he absorbed compassion for sentient beings, vegetarianism, fasting for self-purification, mutual tolerance among individuals of different creeds etc. from Jain religion only. The Indian classics, especially the stories of Shravana and Maharaja Harish Chandra, had a great impact on Gandhiji in his childhood as he admits in his autobiography that it lefts an incredible impression on his mind. Gandhiji's self-identification with Truth and Love as supreme values is traceable to these epic characters. On 4 September 1888, Gandhi went to London to study law at University College, London, where he studied Indian law and jurisprudence and trained as a barrister. In April 1893, he accepted a year-long contract from Dada Abdulla & Co., an Indian firm, to a post in the Colony of Natal, South Africa, then part of the British Empire. What were the environment both in India and other continents which forced him to start political activities?

Gandhji started his political activities in the year 1893 in South Africa when he was only 24 years. Indian immigration in South Africa had begun in 1890 when the white settlers recruited indentured Indian labour, mostly from South India, in order to work in the sugar plantations. The discrimination, to which they were subjected, as apart of their daily life, was inhuman. When Gandhiji reached South Africa he had faced a series of racial discriminations and humiliations. He was thrown off a train at Pietermaritzburg after refusing to move from the first-class to a third-class coach while holding a valid first-class ticket. He was beaten by a driver for refusing to move to arrange a room for a European passenger. In another incident, the magistrate of a Durban court ordered Gandhiji to remove his turban, which he refused to do. He suffered other hardships too. These events were a turning point in Gandhiji's life as they shaped his social activism and awakened him to fight for social injustice. In 1906, the Transvaal government promulgated a new Act compelling registration of the colony's Indian population. At a mass protest meeting held in Johannesburg on 11 September1906, Gandhiji adopted for the first time, his new methodology of satyagraha (devotion to the truth), or non-violent protest. After seven-year struggle, the government successfully repressed the Indian protesters, but the public outcry over the harsh treatment of peaceful Indian protesters by the South African government forced South African General, Jan Christiaan Smuts to negotiate a compromise with Gandhiji. In 1895 Gandhiji sought the intervention of the British Indian Association to urge upon the government of India, the necessity of taking measures for the amelioration of the lot of the Indians in South Africa.[1] "When at the end of 1895 Gandhi came to India to ventilate the grievances of Indians in South Africa, he sought the help of British Indian Association (November, 1895) to make necessary representations to the British and Indian Governments."[2] The British Indian Association "fully supported the views of Gandhi and sent a strong representation on the subject to the government of India on the 5th February, 1897."[3]

The most significant attitude of Gandhiji is clearly understood from his words reported in the Indian Review of October, 1909. He said: "As a man of truth I honestly believe that Hindus

should yield up to the Mahommedans what the latter desire and that they should rejoice in so doing. We can expect unity only if such mutual large –heartedness is displayed." In the words of R.C. Majumdar, "The first sentence is one of those pro-Muslim sayings which bore the special trademark of Gandhi and did incalculable harm to the Hindu-Muslim unity by putting a premium on Muslim intransigence. It was repeated in 1947 when Gandhi made the proposal, which astounded even his devoted followers that Jinnah should be the supreme ruler in India with a cabinet of his own choice, which might consist of only Muslim ministers. The word 'mutual' in the second sentence is meaningless as they never showed the slightest intention of doing any such foolish thing. Gandhi's attitudedid not change even after the creation of Pakistan."[4] Here automatically certain questions arise? How did Gandhiji develop such ideals? How was he able to mold all of his activities in a different manner?

Gandhiji explained satyagraha on 2 September 1917 in Champaran the following manner: "Satyagraha is not physical force. A satyagrahi does not inflict pain on the adversary; he does not seek his destruction. A satyagrahi never resorts to firearms. In the use of satyagraha, there is no ill will whatever. Satyagraha is pure soul force. Truth is the very substance of the soul. That is why this force is called satyagraha. The soul is informed with knowledge. In it blames the flame of love. If someone gives us pain through ignorance, we shall win him through love. Non-violence is the supreme dharma which is the proof of this power of love. Non- violence is a dormant state. In the waking state, it is love. Ruled by love, the world goes on. In English there is a saying, 'Might is Right'. Then there is the doctrine of the survival of the fittest. Both these ideas are contradictory to the above principal. We are alive solely because of love. We are all ourselves the proof of this. Deluded by modern western civilization, we have forgotten our ancient civilization and worship the might of arms."[5]

Gandhi's first major achievements came in 1918 with the Champaran agitation and Kheda satyagraha. Let us read what Gandhiji had written about Kheda Satyagraha: "At present, all over India people's eye are fixed on Kheda district. If it goes under in this struggle, then for a long time people of India will not be able to stand up. There is wisdom in pausing for reflection before undertaking anything; but, having embarked on thing, if we give it up, we only earn the title of cowards. When the people lose their manliness, the country as a whole grows poor in spirit. This struggle in Kheda is to secure suspension of land revenue. There is a very important idea behind it.This is their ideal. It seems to me that, in place of this ideal, we have these days the rule of despotism. That is why I say that we should rise against this Government. I came over to Kheda district. When we investigated the state of the crops, you proved to me and my co-workers that they have been less than four annas. If what you say is true, it is the duty of the Government to concede our demand. And after all, what is it we have asked for? Merely that collection of land revenue be suspended for a year and that, if they announce the suspension, those of us who have means are ready to pay up."[6]

What happened to Gandhiji during the time of First World War? When the government of India had similarly joined the Second World War the reactions remained the same. Study reveals that general people and nationalists never felt any sincere and genuine sympathy towards the British. The congress on the other hand, demanded political reforms like self-Government as a reward of India's profound and avowed loyalty towards the British. The editorial notes in the Modern Review published during the period of the war too validated the attitude of the entire India. The common dictum developed during this period was this: 'The necessity of England is India's opportunity'. In April 1918, during the latter part of World War I, the Viceroy invited

Gandhiji to a War Conference in Delhi perhaps to show his support to them. Gandhiji at first refused to attend the conference as Tilak, Mrs. Beasant and Ali Brothers were not invited, but, later, was persuaded by the viceroy to change his view.[7] Gandhiji agreed to recruit Indians for the war effort actively. Gandhi's war recruitment campaign brought into question his consistency on nonviolence as his friend Charlie Andrews confirms, "Personally I have never been able to reconcile this with his own conduct in other respects, and it is one of the points where I have found myself in painful disagreement". Here the approach of Gandhiji is questionable. R.C. Majumdar said that "the only notable exception was Gandhi, who was loyal to the British to the core of his heart, and was genuine in his efforts to help them during the war, without any condition."[8]

"While Tilak was busy in England, momentous events occurred in India culminating in Jallianwala Bagh massacre and martial law in the Punjab. It is, at least partially, due to the absence of Tilak from India during this crisis that the political leadership gradually passed into the hands of Gandhi. But at the end of 1918, Tilak held the unique position of the uncrowned King of Nationalist India, the most powerful leader in India at the moment," comments R.C. Majumdar.[9] According to Ram Gopal, "There is no doubt that Tilak voiced the feelings of the nation far more truly than did Gandhi, who was later hailed as the father of the Nation."[10]

On 6 April 1919 through Gandhiji had started his All India Satyagraha against the Rowlett Act, he suspended it on 18 April 1919, on account of the outbreak of violence. Gandhiji's demonstration at this critical moment is quoted here: "We are now in a position to expect to be arrested any moment. It is, therefore, necessary to bear in mind that, any one is arrested, he should without causing any difficulty allow himself to be arrested and, if summoned to appear before a court, he should do so. If a fine is imposed with the alternative of imprisonment, imprisonment should be accepted. If only a fine is imposed, it ought not to be paid but that his property, if he was any, should be allowed to be sold. There should be no demonstration of grief or otherwise made by the remaining satyagrahis by reason of the arrest and imprisonment of their comrade. It cannot be too often repeated that we protest court imprisonment and we may not complain of it when we actually receive it. When once imprisoned, it is our duty to confirm to all prison regulations, as prison reform is no part of our campaign at the present moment. A Satyagrahi may not resort to surreptitious practices, of which ordinary prisoners are often found to be guilty. All a satyagrahi does can only and must be done openly."[11]

Let us go through the letter written by Gandhiji on the Non- cooperation Movement on 1 August 1920 to explore another side of him. "…I can retain neither respect nor affection for such a Government. The attitude of the Imperial and Your Excellency's Governments on the Punjab question has given me an additional sense for grave dissatisfaction. I had the honour as Your Excellency is aware as one of the Congress Commissioners to investigate the cause of disorder in the Punjab during April of 1919 and it is my deliberate conviction that Sir Michael O' Dwyer was totally unfit to hold the office of Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab and that his policy was primarily responsible for infuriating the mob at Amritsar … I have therefore ventured to suggest a remedy of non- cooperation, which enables those who wish to dissociate themselves from the Government and which, if it is unattended by violence and undertaken in an ordered manner must compel it to retrace its steps and undo the wrongs committed. But whilst I pursue the policy of non- cooperation in so far as I can carry the people with me, I shall not lose hopes that you will yet see your way to do justice..."[12]

Non-cooperation enjoyed widespread appeal and success, increasing excitement and participation from all strata of Indian society. The boycott of foreign cloth was a stroke of genius which demonstrated to rulers and the world the Indian people's determination to be free. A large number of young men and women who dropped out in 1920-21 went back to the officially recognized educational institution but many often became whole time cadres of the movement.[13] But when the movement reached its apex, it ended abruptly as a result of a violent clash in the town of Chauri Chaura, Uttar Pradesh, in February 1922. Fearing that the movement was about to take a turn towards violence, Gandhi called off the campaign of mass civil disobedience. According to Andrew Roberts, "this was the third time that Gandhi had called off a major campaign; leaving in the lurch more than 15,000 supporters who were jailed for the cause." Gandhi was arrested on 10 March 1922, tried for sedition, and sentenced to six years' imprisonment. The years 1922-1927 faced a stage of contradictory developments. While the Swarajists and Gandhian constructive workers were quite active in their own separate ways, there simultaneously prevailed virulent factionalism and indiscipline in both the camps. Gandhiji wrote in May 1927: "My only hope therefore lies in prayer and answer to prayer."[14]

The civil obedience movement served as the baptism of fire so far as any other organized political attempt was concerned, and called forth the latent spirit of sturdy nationalism and bold defiance of autocracy and tyranny which henceforth marked every stage of India's struggle for freedom. The new ideals of nationalism preached by its great leaders like Tilak Arabinda Ghosh and Lala Lajpat Rai assumed concrete shape, which may be regarded as the precursor of the civil obedience movement of Mahatma Gandhiji.[15] It was therefore, not accidental that khadi bhandar workers, students and teachers of national schools and colleges, and Gandhian ashrams' inmates served as the backbone of the civil disobedience movements both as organizers and as active Satyagrahis.[16] R. Palme Dutt remarked that this movement was at its highest point when its full power had been placed in Gandhiji's hands. R. Palme Dutt describes Gandhiji like this: "In the midst of this ferment of national enthusiasm and hope one man on the Congress side was unhappy and alarmed at the development of events. His movement, the movement that he had envisaged, was not developing at all in the way that he had intended. Something was going wrong. This was not the perfect idyllic philosophic non violent movement he had pictured. He had unchained a monster. Ugly elements were creeping in. Reckless men, especially among his Muslim colleagues, were even beginning to demand the abandonment of the non violence clause. More and more openly, already in those closing weeks of 1921, when the tens of thousands of fighters were going to prison with his name on their lips, he was expressing his alarm and disgust, as in his revealing cry that Swaraj stank in his nostrils. That man was Gandhi."[17]

Why did Mr. Dutt develop such impression on Gandhji? The answer is simple, which would be understood from the following passage: The government, represented by Lord Edward Irwin, decided to negotiate with Gandhiji and as a result The Gandhi–Irwin Pact was signed in March 1931. The British Government agreed to free all political prisoners, in return for the suspension of the civil disobedience movement. As a result of the pact, Gandhiji was invited to attend the Round Table Conference in London as the sole representative of the Indian National Congress. The conference was a disappointment to Gandhiji and the nationalists, because it focused on the Indian princes and Indian minorities rather than on a transfer of power. World War II broke out in 1939 and initially, Gandhi favored offering non-violent moral support to the

British effort, but other Congress leaders were offended by the unilateral inclusion of India in the war, without consultation of the people's representatives. All Congressmen resigned from office.

After long deliberations, as the war progressed, Gandhiji intensified his demand for independence, drafting a resolution calling for the British to Quit India. This was Gandhiji's and the Congress Party's most definitive revolt aimed at securing the British exit from India. He called on all Congressmen and Indians to maintain discipline via. Ahimsa and Karo Ya Maro (Do or Die) in the cause of ultimate freedom. Gandhiji and the entire Congress Working Committee were arrested in Bombay by the British on 9 August 1942. He was released before the end of the war on 6 May 1944 because of his failing health and necessary surgery. As the event of Jinnah's campaign for Pakistan was a serious matter, Gandhiji met Jinnah in September 1944 in Bombay. At the end of the Quit India movement, the British gave clear indications that power would be transferred to Indian hands. At this critical stage Gandhiji called off the struggle, and around 100,000 political prisoners were released, including the Congress's leadership. When Jinnah called for Direct Action, on 16 August 1946, Gandhiji was infuriated and visited the most riot prone areas to stop the massacres, personally. He made strong efforts to unite the Indian Hindus, Muslims and Christians and struggled for the emancipation of the untouchables in Hindu society.

Different phases of Gandhiji are clearly understood from various sources. Gandhiji believed that without the upliftment of the lower castes and adivasis there could be no united struggle against colonialism. It is learnt that Ambedkar, the leader of the depressed and untouchables was not happy with what Gandhiji had done for the down trodden. He had expressed this view in his book, 'What Congress and Gandhiji have done to the untouchables.' He remarked that Gandhiji did nothing to improve the lots of the lower caste people. He further added that the depressed class, because of this reason, did not participate in the noncooperation movement launched by the congress under the leadership of Gandhiji. Dr. Ambedkar argued that if Gandhiji wanted to improve the condition of the Harijans he would have gone on fast unto death for their cause. He questioned Gandhiji by asking why Gandhiji did not condemn the ill treatment of the upper class of the Hindus with the lower class. He criticized Gandhiji that he never raised his voice against caste system.[18]We have to endorse that Gandhji is biased by Ambedkar.We all knew that Gandhiji pleaded the human rights of the depressed very sincerely. With the efforts of Ambedkar, the British Government of India passed the communal Award on 16 August 1932 and in which Harijans and other depressed classes were listed in the separate election system and also were given reserved seats and separate election zones. But Gandhji had opposed to it as he thought that it would disintegrate the territorial identity of our country. To quote Mallik, "The political identity of the dalits, what we see today in the shape of their dependency, utter helplessness, spineless leadership, lack of unity and lack of mutual support and understanding among themselves; that is the result of the great tragic- historic Poona Pact (1932), reconciled between Gandhi and Ambedkar with much disagreement and less agreement, in another words, under the compulsion of the times."[19]

In spite of their deep reverence to each other, Gandhiji and Rabindranath Tagore engaged in protracted debates many times and these debates exemplify the philosophical differences between the two. On 15 January 1934, an earthquake hit Bihar and caused extensive damage and loss of life. Gandhiji maintained this was because of the sin committed by upper caste Hindus by not letting untouchables in their temples. Tagore vehemently opposed Gandhiji's stance,

maintaining that an earthquake can only be caused by natural forces, not moral reasons, however repugnant the practice of untouchability may be.

In fact, Gandhian constructive work was multi-faceted in its content which brought some much needed relief to the poor and it made the urban based and upper caste cadres familiar with the conditions of villages and lower castes. Gandhiji empathized with theosophy's message of universal brotherhood and consequent toleration and hence his life achievement stands unique in political history. He has invented a completely new and humane means for the liberation of an oppressed country, and practiced it with greatest energy and devotion. According to Majumdar, "probably such an ideal was never preached again till we come to the days of Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi."[20] And hence we can aptly say that what the other leaders of the so called terrorist party had failed to achieve, was done for them by Gandhiji. "His vision of a village-dominated economy was shunted aside during his lifetime as rural romanticism and his call for a national ethos of personal austerity and nonviolence has proved antithetical to the goals of an aspiring economic and military power ... Gandhi is still revered here, and credited with shaping India's political identity as a tolerant, secular democracy.

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